

Text: Matthew 22:15-46

Title: Questions for the Lord...and from the Lord

Truth: Jesus silences His critics with amazing answers.

Date/Location: Wednesday August 24, 31; September 7 and 11, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

The Pharisees and Herodians were desperate to find an excuse to get rid of Jesus. They wanted to kill him (John 5:18, 11:53; Luke 13:31) so they could maintain their grip on power. The Pharisees were the religious party, and the Herodians were the political party. Many of the Herodians were likely Sadducees as well.

I. Taxes, 22:15-22

- A. The verbal fluff in verse 16 introduces question was just that—with the purpose to “butter up” Jesus and get Him off guard (as if that was possible?!).
- B. The main question is in verse 17: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” Let’s try to answer the question in a general way from what we know elsewhere in Scripture.
 - 1. Romans 13:6-7 commands Christians to pay taxes—in the context of a wicked Roman ruler. You might not like student loan forgiveness, but if it holds up to court challenges, your tax money will be paying for that—or the inflation-weakened dollars in your bank account and wallet will be doing so.
 - 2. The Law of Moses did impose taxes on the Israelite nation, but the taxes were paid within the nation itself to its own government. At the time of Christ, the nation was taken over by another nation. Therefore,

not having their own government, by logical extension they would have to pay the ruling government to carry out the basic functions of human government. And why was that government in place? Israel disobeyed God. Paying taxes to the Romans was a consequence of their disobedience.

3. Jeremiah 29:5-10 is suggestive that the people were to pay taxes to Babylon—a previous power that took over their governance when disobedient 6 centuries before Christ.

4. Joseph was a righteous man and he went to be registered, probably as part of paying taxes (Luke 2:1ff).

C. In sum, yes, it is in accord with God's morals, and even the Mosaic Law, to pay taxes—even to a foreign occupying power. Being disobedient to God, and as a consequence being overrun by an occupier cannot become convenient excuse for you to stop paying taxes! You lost, you pay.

The tax may have been the poll tax, just a part of the taxes assessed by Rome. Even if not, the principles here do not change.

D. Jesus knew they were testing Him. They were wicked in their hearts—not wanting an answer to an honest question, but wanting a slip-up to a dishonest question. Jesus also identifies that a major part of their wickedness was that they were hypocrites. I wonder if they were being somehow supported by Rome! Whether or not that was the case, the question was a no-win situation. If Jesus says no, it is not lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, the Herodians will accuse him of tax evasion and crimes

against the state. If Jesus says yes, it IS lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees will be upset because they are patriotic, and so were many among the populace. In effect, they were asking Jesus to adjudicate their difference on the matter and say who was right. In fact, neither were truly right.

- E. He told them to show him the tax money—that is, the money that would be used to pay taxes.
- F. So they brought a denarius, the common coin of the day.
- G. Jesus asked whose image and what word was on the coin. It was Caesar's, probably referring to Tiberius Caesar who ruled 14-37 AD. He was the second emperor, just after his step-father Augustus. His face was on one side, the other was him on a throne. Although this may have been considered by the hyper-legalists as idolatry, it is not idolatry because the persons using the coin are not necessarily worshipping Caesar. They are just paying their bills! The point of Exodus 20:4 is to prohibit worship of idols—not to prohibit all likenesses, paintings, drawings, castings, etc.
- H. Jesus replied with the famous phrase “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” What this did was to highlight man's dual responsibility to both God and government. These responsibilities should both be possible in any good governmental system. Unfortunately, conflicts arise in many societies where the government intrudes upon the consciences of the people to worship. But in general, you are to give to each – God and government – what they are due. This is a command. Caesar is not lord of everything. God *is* Lord of everything but has His people

pay taxes lest they offend others (Matthew 17:27). Children of the King of kings should not have to pay taxes, but that will come into view during the future age.

- I. They could not trap Him, so they left him alone for the moment. They were amazed at His shrewd answer.
- J. Taxes. Not a fun topic, but a necessary one. Since Jesus commanded us to render to the government what is owed, we should do so cheerfully, without complaint. We must plan our finances accordingly so that we do not get into trouble. We have sales tax, income tax, FICA tax, death tax, estimated tax, withholdings, tax forms, etc. We must plan our giving to the Lord alongside our taxes and necessary living expenses so that our priorities are correct. Leisure, vacation, hobbies, etc. must be fit in after those required items.
- K. Notice that the Pharisees lied to Pilate when they said, “We have found this fellow ... forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar” (Luke 23:2). The evidence is clear that Jesus did no such thing!

II. Resurrection Deniers, 11:23-33

- A. The Sadducees were like those in Corinth who said there is no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). They are theological “liberals.” They deny the supernatural. They also denied the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8). In contrast, we believe in the existence of angels and evil spirits and human spirits and the resurrection of the dead because God’s word says so. We are convinced because we believe in God who has spoken of these things.
- B. They construct a ridiculous hypothetical situation of seven brothers each marrying the same woman—each

one marrying her after the previous brother dies. This is built on the teaching in the Law that if a man dies with no children, the brother is to marry the widow and raise up offspring for the dead (Deut. 25:5-10). This law feels very strange to us because we do not place the same importance on inheritance of land and continuation of the family line. To understand it intuitively we would have to be immersed in that culture from birth. Even *in* that culture, the scenario is so unlikely as to be a mere thought experiment.

- C. The basis of that thought experiment is that the Sadducees assume that marriage in this life carries into the next life, so that a woman married to two different men in this life will create a conflict in heaven. With seven husbands in this life, the problem that arises in Heaven must be *really* intractable. Therefore, they reason, this shows that the whole doctrine of resurrection is a farce. It cannot be true. Let us assume for the sake of argument that this is their best reasoning, the strongest case for their viewpoint. They are challenging Jesus to unravel their belief system, but they believe it cannot be done.
- D. It is their assumption that is faulty, and therefore everything built on that assumption is faulty as well. Jesus corrects their faulty assumption about marriage in heaven. Resurrected people are not married. They do not have children. They are more like angels in that way than humans—though they are indeed still humans. This is one reason why we teach that marriage lasts until death or the rapture. There are other Scriptures on this topic. We see one in Romans 7:2-3. Remarriage after the death of one spouse is well attested and is not at all

questionable in Biblical teaching. But being married or becoming remarried in heaven is not a “thing.” So the Sadducees’ entire story fails.

- D. Jesus then turns to their false doctrine of resurrection in verses 31-33. Whereas He addressed it indirectly before, He will speak to it directly now.
- E. Jesus confronted them with two things they are ignorant about: “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” Both of those things—the Bible that they had and the divine power—should have easily alerted them that their no-resurrection belief was false.
- F. First, addressing **the power of God**, it does not take much mental creativity to realize that if God has the power to create the Universe, and He created it and filled it with plants and animals and mankind, and everything else, and gave them life, then it is obviously no problem for him to re-enliven that life if it dies. Resurrection is a reality correlative to the power of God.
- G. Second, addressing the Sadducees’ **ignorance of the Scriptures**, Jesus chastises them for not *really* reading (with understanding) the portion where God says, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). The basis of Jesus’s confident explanation here is the tense of the verb: God says “I AM” not “I WAS.” Subtle? Indeed. True? Absolutely. Just because it is a detailed point does not mean that it is false or unimportant! The point is that God is the God of the living, not of the dead. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still “alive” in the sense that they are consciously in the presence of God.

A point of caution: this does *not* mean that the patriarchs are not dead. They are dead and will be until they are resurrected at the resurrection of the just at the start of the millennial reign of Christ. At that time, spirit and body will be rejoined to form a living soul (nephesh) once again. But presently they exist in the dead state.

H. People who heard this answer probably had that feeling of “Wow, I never thought of it like that!” They knew that the Lord was right. They knew in their eternity-informed hearts that there is something beyond the grave. They may have known that those who die are not in an unconscious state of soul sleep (Psalm 146:4, Eccl. 3:21, 12:7), or they may have thought soul sleep was right (Daniel 12:2)—although it is not right. We certainly know from later revelation in God’s word that people exist in a conscious state after death in either the present (“intermediate”) Heaven or in Hades.

Nevertheless, the listeners were astonished. They were captivated by the Lord’s teaching. He’s the best teacher ever, of course. There was no comparison to the Pharisees...they were so much worse than Jesus in demeanor and in ability to teach the truth.

I. The truth of resurrection is sure. As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. Every person will be resurrected, even unbelievers. Daniel 12:2 says as much. It is too commonly thought that only the righteous will be resurrected. An isolated reading of portions like Isaiah 26:19 or Ezekiel 37:13 might lead you to believe that only the good people are raised. But in John 5:28-29, Jesus is very clear that “all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: those who did good to a

resurrection of life, those who did evil to a resurrection of judgment. Both good and evil will be resurrected. Acts 24:15 is even more clear: Paul's hope included that there will be a resurrection of the dead—just *and* unjust.

- J. By the way, why would God resurrect the unjust if He is going to soon or eventually annihilate them? Why have them suffer in Hades, then be resurrected, then suffer some more in Hell, and then annihilate them? That seems like double if not triple jeopardy. Of course, the overall length of punishment is not infinite then. If you object to the eternal existence and punishment of the lost, why have them go through all these steps? Why not just annihilate them immediately at death and be done with it? The idea of annihilation after all the other stuff seems absurd.

III. The Most Important Commandment, 11:34-40

- A. For the first question, the Pharisees sent their disciples with the Herodians to entangle Jesus with the tax question. They failed to achieve their goal when the Lord told them that some things belong to Caesar, and some other things belong to God. Then the Sadducees came and queried the Lord about resurrection. They were taken to Bible school when the Lord rebuked them for not knowing God's power nor the Scriptures. They should have known God can raise the dead, and in fact does do so, based on a careful reading of their own Scriptures. Yet those in that age will not be married, so there is no concern about prior marriages being carried over from earthly life. The third question comes from a Pharisee-lawyer.

- B. The question is this: “Which is the great commandment in the law?” This seems to be a dangerous question because it is difficult for a person take the entire law of the Jewish Bible (= Old Testament) and boil it down to one command. The Law is contained in the non-historical narrative portions of Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. It is a large body of material, although not as large as the entire Old Testament.
- C. But there is another side of us that understands there must be some unifying principle(s) or grand themes in God’s ways with man which can be expressed in a concise manner. And that is indeed the case. Our walk with God is a relational one, not one of mere religious formality or an action-centered list of commands and prohibitions. Because of this, there are basic principles that guide us in that relationship and which “teach” us the detailed principles intuitively. Besides that, humans have an in-built conscience that works with what God has written in a way that fits together quite well for the believer.
- D. The narrative does not give details, obviously, but even in the midst of this tense, confrontational situation, Jesus answers straightaway. And He not only gives the #1 commandment, but #2 as well!
- E. The first, as would be obvious to any observant Jewish person, from Deuteronomy 6:4--“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,¹ with all your soul, and with all your strength.” See also Deuteronomy 10:12,

¹ In the Lexham English Septuagint, heart is rendered as “mind.”

11:1, 11:13, 11:22, 13:3, 19:9; Joshua 22:5. This is not an isolated command in the OT.

As for the issue of heart, mind, soul, strength: if you are getting tied up in the details of whether mind and heart are the same, or whether physical strength should be included or not, or if there should be four or three items in the list, then you are not on the right track. The right track is not explaining the different divisions of the human make-up and that each part needs to love the Lord. Rather, by specifying some parts of our constitution, God and Christ are saying that ALL of us needs to love him. From top to bottom, inside and out, mind and body, soul and spirit, etc. Everything. Nothing less is worthy of the love, mercy, and grace that God has shown to us.

F. The second summarizing command cited by Jesus is from Leviticus 19:18: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If you love God, you will love your neighbor who was made by God and serves God, and is a care to God. If you mistreat your neighbor, that is an offense to God and shows no love for God.

Who is your neighbor? Just about anyone you come into contact with qualifies: in your neighborhood, at the store, on the street, or on social media. Even a Samaritan might be a neighbor to you (Luke 10:29-37)!

G. Once again we see that a good working knowledge of the Old Testament is crucial in our understanding of the New Testament. Many principles in the Old are reviewed in the New. There are new things, of course, otherwise the NT would not be truly *progressive revelation*. But so much is the same.

And if we have that working knowledge, we see that the two commandments stated by the Lord are the lynchpins of the whole system. If you love God, you will not have any other gods, or make idols or commit idolatry or use the name of the Lord in vain. If you love God's creation, you will honor your parents and not murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, or covet because those things are not manifestations of love. They are manifestations of selfishness and hate, but not love. In other words, as Jesus says, on these two commandments hang all the Law and prophets. They summarize the whole matter.

H. Something else happened during this conversation which is not recorded by Matthew. We find it in Mark 12:32-34. What happened is the reason that there is not a rebuke or further questions by the Pharisees. The lawyer of their own who asked the question was getting too close to believing what Jesus was saying.

1. The lawyer/scribe said that Jesus was correct. What an admission from someone associated with this group of hateful people!
2. The lawyer restated what Jesus said—that there is only one true God, and that we are to love Him and consequently our neighbors as well.
3. He added that this is more important than offerings or sacrifices. He had a grasp on the fact that being faithfully obedient to the Lord is the center of Biblical teaching. The offerings and sacrifices—despite their prominent place in the minds of some—are at *most* secondary to loving God.
4. Jesus commended him for his wise answer and commented that this one was not far from the

kingdom of God. That is, he was not far from “being born again” in the language of John 3:3-5. He was close to repentance and faith.

5. This was the end of questions—at least from the opponents *to* Jesus. Too much interaction with Jesus was harming the opponents’ cause and “endangering” some of their people because they might actually start to believe in Him!

I. The passage is fairly easy to understand. The question is this: are you holding back something in your love for God? Do you have love for God at all? Do you just love yourself?

What is love anyway? Just think about that. Affection, appreciation, gratitude, willingness to serve (and help others, though God does not need help), concern for the best in the one loved, seeking to increase the honor of the one loved.

Do you have any kind of relationship like this with God through faith in Christ? Have you fallen down on the job, so to speak, and left your first love? Has the love of things or people or entertainment or pleasure or ease or riches taken a front seat and God has gone to the back?

IV. David’s Son is His Lord, 11:41-46

A. The religious and secular leaders asked three questions of Jesus in order to trip him up—and four if you count the one in Matthew 21 about His authority. The final question of the series is not *to* Jesus, but *from* Jesus. The religious and secular leaders are played out—their questions availed nothing in the direction they wanted. The Lord then completely turned the tables on them by

asking His own question. We can anticipate before even reading the question that it was an important one. It would not necessarily be a stumper or brain bender, but one that would point out an important spiritual lesson for the stiff-necked and hard-hearted religious people of the day. While the Pharisees' questions were largely irrelevant except for the lessons that Jesus could turn them into, this question points to the Messiah who can save them from the darkness of sin.

- B. The Lord asks a question about the promised Messiah: whose son is he? The question assumes some common knowledge. First, the Messiah was understood to be a human being. He would be a real man. He would be the offspring of someone else. But second, he would be somehow anointed by God for his special office. Third, the Messiah was a sufficiently well-known figure in the Hebrew Bible that a question about Him would be intelligible to any religious leader. They were awaiting the coming of the Messiah, hoping He would appear to deliver them. That hope permeates the minds of the faithful Jewish person throughout the ages. Simeon, for example, longed for the coming of the Messiah, the “consolation” of Israel (Luke 2:25-26).
- C. Where is the Messiah in the Old Testament? Among other places, you find the Messiah in Psalm 110:1, which the Lord quotes next. But He is also mentioned in Psalm 2:2, 7 and Daniel 9:25-26. Those texts reveal to us that He will be a Prince, in fact a King (Psalm 2:6). The Messiah is the “horn of David” (Psalm 132:17). Psalm 89:51 is translated by some as “your chosen king” but it is the word “your anointed” which in this passage refers to

King David. For what is the Messiah anointed? To be king—just like David His forefather according to the flesh.

We could do a dedicated study just on this topic. The Scriptures are overflowing with references to Messiah, the Christ. See John 1:41, 4:25, 7:41, Matt. 16:16, 20. Paul in Acts 17:3 proved that Jesus is the Messiah. In 53 New Testament verses we see a reference to “the Christ.” But only the OT passages would be known to the Jews in the early first century. Even though there are not thousands of such references, there are plenty enough that they were awaiting his arrival.

- D. Just like when the scribes demonstrated knowledge that the Messiah ruler would arise out of Bethlehem (Mat. 2:5-6), again this time they answered correctly: Messiah is the son of David. They correctly understood that the Messiah would be the son of David. “Son of David” was a Messianic title in common use at that time (Matt. 1:1, 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30-31, 21:9, 21:15).
- E. It is altogether too possible to know the right answers to certain Sunday school questions, but not to know the Savior. The scribes and priests knew the answers but did not know Him.
- F. This fact—that the Messiah/servant was to be a human offspring of a human king²—fit very well the sensibilities of the Pharisees and their ilk because it meant they could believe that the Messiah was a *mere* man. But the exalted language used of Him in the OT as well as the NT will not permit us to retain that view for long at all. And

² Some generations down the family tree.

Jesus identifies the verse that is the death-knell to the Messiah-is-merely-a-man belief.

G. Jesus cites Psalm 110:1 to show that David, who was under the superintending hand of God's Spirit, called the Messiah by the title *Lord*. Granting that Messiah is the son of David, Jesus says, how is it that David the father calls his son as LORD? Jesus then cited the verse where that happened: Psalm 110:1.

H. "The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."

How is it possible if Messiah is merely a man that He could be called Lord by one who ought to know—one as highly revered as King David?

This is powerful because it was well understood that Psalm 110:1 speaks of the Messiah. This is clear for at least two reasons. **First**, the context has to do with installing this One as king. Phrasing like His enemies would be a footstool, His scepter from Zion, ruling in the midst of enemies, and the people willingly following—all of these point to the one chosen (anointed) to rule. **Second**, the context speaks about this one also being declared as a Melchizedekian priest. There is no mistake now that we are talking about Messiah because only He would fit the bill as both **king** and **priest**. He also would be **prophet** (Deut 18:5 indicates the prophetic line culminates in One particular prophet, and it was so understood, correctly, by the religious leaders, John 1:21).

By the way, the Pharisees of the day could revere King David, or others of the past like Moses, only because they did not have to live under their actual rule. The Pharisees would have chafed under their godly leadership just like

they chafed at Jesus. But they could revere these men of old because they were dead and their authority was only theoretical and did not negatively impact the religious leaders. They could imagine David or Moses or the others to be men made in their own image (their = Pharisees) and they would not have to change their ways at all.

- I. We know therefore that the LORD is speaking to the Messiah-Lord, and David says that Messiah-Lord is “my Lord.” So He is something more than the human descendant of David, for David would never address a mere man, a subordinate, a younger, as Lord!
- J. The Lord has debunked the mere-man theology of the Pharisees and proven that the Messiah is also deity—Lord. How? Because an authority as great as David, moved by the Holy Spirit, called him by that title. The king in the ancient Jewish government calls no one Lord. He is lord—except for God! Furthermore, the command to this Lord from the LORD is that He must sit at the right hand of God—the place of power and glory—and wait until God turns His enemies into a footstool. The Jewish people believed this was a reference to Messiah. They did not accept that Jesus was that man, but they were right that the Lord in Psalm 110:1 was the Messiah.

They became confused, however, about the identity of the Messiah with regard to the suffering servant. How could one be so exalted, and one (another one?) be so abased? This is the mystery of the Messiah. How is there suffering in Isaiah 53:1-10, but glory in 53:11-12? How is He at the right hand of God in Psalm 110:1 but not in Sheol in Psalm 16:10?

- K. Think about the question again. How exactly can a man who is a king have a son and call him Lord?
- L. No one was able to answer his question. It stumped them. Does it stump you too? If the son becomes a higher king than the father, then the father could indeed address him as lord. That is not usually the case because a king-father dies and the son reigns, and so the father has no opportunity to address his son as king. But in this case, the King (capital K) Jesus will supersede the father David, and the David will call Jesus Lord (capital L). After the father dies, he will be resurrected and will in fact be able to personally address his Son as Lord. He did so in advance in writing the Psalm. He even did so before Jesus came to have a human nature and body, yet He was already David's Lord.

And how is that? Well, Jesus is not only son of David, but also Son of God! That is how the Messiah can be both Lord and at the same time Son of David, because He is also Son of God. See Matthew 26:63-64. He is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

Conclusion

The questioning was over. No one dared ask him any questions because they knew they would be destroyed. This last question exposed that the leaders' understanding of Messiah was correct about his being from the line of David, but incorrect as to His deity. Also, This forms sort of a bookend to the question about authority, because the Messiah is Lord. On whose authority does he do what he does? Well, God's to be sure, but His own as well!

What exact insight David had to the nature of his offspring and whether he knew how the Son would come from pre-existing divine stock is not clear to this author. But he knew enough that this Messiah was going to be David's Lord. And if David's Lord, then all the Jews' Lord. And if all their Lord, then our Lord as well. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). And if you willingly do so now, you will be saved (Romans 10:9-10).

MAP

I do not believe Jesus to be questioning the validity of the title "Son of David" (France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 849). Rather, He is setting up the Pharisees to show them their understanding of the Messiah was incomplete.